

24. A method for repairing railcars, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a railcar maintenance facility wherein the maintenance facility comprises a plurality of maintenance stations and a transfer area;

providing a railcar requiring maintenance service;

moving the railcar to the transfer area;

transferring the railcar to at least one of the maintenance stations;

working on the railcar within the maintenance stations; and

moving the railcar out of the maintenance facility₁;

providing a communication means at each maintenance station for communicating whether the maintenance station is available to receive the railcar;

communicating to an operator via the communication means the availability of the maintenance stations; and

transferring the railcar to a maintenance station that is available based on the communication of the maintenance stations to the operator.

A10

Concluded

REMARKS

The present amendment is submitted in response to the Office Action dated May 22, 2002. In the Office Action, the Examiner objected to the drawings as failing to comply with 37 CFR §1.84(p)(5). In addition, the disclosure was objected to because of informalities. Further, claims 15 and 16 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. In addition, claims 1, 2, 4, 10, 13 and 20 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Tatum in view of Ng. Still further, claims 5 and 15 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Tatum

in view of Ng, and further in view of Williams. In addition, claims 6, 7, 11 and 12 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Tatum in view of Ng, and further in view of Japanese Patent No. 09248766. Claim 9 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Tatum in view of Ng and further in view of Kipp. And, claims 14 and 16 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Tatum in view of Ng and further in view of Stapp.

With respect to the objection of the drawings, Applicants respectfully submit a replacement for FIG. 1, whereupon reference to "48" is marked in red. Applicants respectfully submit that the amendment to FIG. 1 overcomes the objection noted by the Examiner.

With respect to the objection of the disclosure due to informalities, Applicants note that the specification has been amended to correct the same. More specifically, Applicants have amended page 6, line 10 to change "37" to --39--. In addition, page 8, line 13 has been amended to change "46" to --48--. Further, page 12, line 23 has been amended to delete "it". Still further, page 13, lines 20 and 22 have been amended to change "37" to --39--. Moreover, page 14, lines 9 and 11 have been amended to change "37" to --39--. Also, page 16, lines 29 and 30 have been amended to change "37" to --39--. In addition, page 11, line 12 has been amended to change "50" to --32--. Applicants respectfully submit that the changes to the disclosure overcome the objections thereto.

With respect to the rejection of claims 15 and 16 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which the Applicants regard as the invention, Applicants respectfully submit that the amendments to the claims overcome the rejection thereto. More specifically, claim

15 has been amended to include a step of "providing an inbound railway." In addition, claims 16 has been amended to define a step of "providing a plurality of transfer tables within the transfer area." Applicants respectfully submit that the amendments to claims 15 and 16 overcome the rejections thereto under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph.

With respect to the rejection of claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Tatum in view of Ng, Applicants respectfully submit that the amendment overcomes the rejections thereto. More specifically, Applicants have incorporated claim 3, indicated as being allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim, into claim 1 and have cancelled claim 3.

Claims 2 and 4-20 depend from amended independent claim 1. These claims are further believed allowable over the references of record for the same reason set forth above with respect to their parent claims since each set forth additional steps of Applicants' novel methods.

Applicants note with appreciation that claims 3, 8 and 17-19 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form. As discussed above, claim 3 has been incorporated into independent claim 1. By the present amendment, Applicants have further rewritten claims 8 and 17-19 in independent form as new claims 21-24, including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Applicants respectfully submit that newly added claims 21-24 are in allowable form.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing remarks and amendments, Applicants respectfully submit that all of the claims in the application are in allowable form and that the application is now in condition for allowance. If, however, any outstanding issues remain, Applicants

In re Barich, et al.
U.S. Patent Application No. 09/725,656

respectfully urge the Examiner to telephone Applicants' attorney so that the same may be resolved and the application expedited to issue. Applicants' respectfully request the Examiner to indicate all claims as allowable and to pass the application to issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: July 31, 2002

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part of #7
(print attached)

MARKED UP VERSION TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

In the Specification

Please replace the first full paragraph (lines 11-19) on page 6 of the specification with the following paragraph:

--The inbound queues 14a-14d for the sorted railcars may terminate at a transfer area 18 that may be used to transfer railcars throughout the railcar maintenance facility 10 based on the type of maintenance needed. A primary transfer table 20 may be located within the transfer area 18 and may operate along a length of track 22 that may be adjacent to maintenance stations, described below. The primary transfer table 20 may facilitate the movement of railcars between the inbound queues 14 and the maintenance stations 24. The maintenance stations may include, but may not be limited to: repair stations 28a-28e, an interior blast station 30, an exterior blast station 32, an exterior paint station 34, interior paint stations 35a-35c, cure stations 36a-36c, and an assembly and test station [37] 39.--

Please replace the first full paragraph (lines 3-13)) on page 8 of the specification with the following paragraph:

--Additionally, the present invention illustrated in Figure 1 may preferably include an administrative building 43 having offices therein and a service parts inventory storage area 45 located adjacent to the repair stations 28a-28e. The service parts inventory storage area 45 may contain a plurality of parts useful for repairing or otherwise maintaining railcars. Generally, a repair station worker may retrieve parts from within the service parts inventory storage area 45 to repair railcars within the repair stations 28a-28e. Moreover, a maintenance area 48 may be provided that may house equipment for repairing specific

parts on the railcars, or for any other purpose that may be apparent to those skilled in the art. For example, damaged valves on tank cars may be repaired by being removed from the tank cars in one of the repair stations 28a-28e. The valve may then be taken to the maintenance area [46] 48 for repair.--

Please replace the first full paragraph (lines 1-14) on page 11 of the specification with the following paragraph:

--Referring again to Figure 1, the exterior blast station 32 is illustrated and may be used to prepare railcars for an exterior paint or coating operation. Generally, the exterior blast station 32 may contain any equipment useful for removing a coating and/or any other residual material from the exterior of a railcar. In a preferred embodiment, the exterior blast station 32 may have space for two railcars. A first bay (not shown) within the exterior blast station 32 may be utilized for the blasting of the exterior of the railcar. Moreover, a second bay (not shown) within the exterior blast station 32 may be utilized to provide light repair to the railcar prior to or after the blasting of the railcar. The second bay may allow repairs to be made to the railcar without using one of the repair stations 28a-28e. This may prevent delays that may occur when a mechanical defect is discovered on a railcar that has been loaded into the exterior blast station 32. If a railcar loaded into the exterior blast station [50] 32 requires mechanical repair prior to the exterior blasting operation, the railcar can be transferred forward into the second bay for mechanical repair allowing the first bay to continue the blasting operation without a delay.--

Please replace the fourth paragraph on page 12 (p. 12, lines 1-30 and p. 13, lines 1-5) with the following full paragraph:

--Still referring to Figure 1, the lining queue area 26 may be provided to prevent works-in-process from draining the efficiency of the repair workstations 28a-28e. It has been determined that the interior blasting operation that may be implemented within the interior blast station 30 may cause a bottleneck within the maintenance facility 10 since [it] the time period required to complete the interior blasting operation is relatively longer than any other operation implemented in any other maintenance station. Railcars requiring service from the interior blast station 30 may be stored within a set of tracks within the lining queue area 26 prior to blasting so that the railcars do not delay the services of, for example, one of the repair stations 28a-28e. Further, holding the railcars within the lining queue area 26 may allow a railcar to enter the interior blast station 30 in a quick and efficient manner due to the proximity of the railcar to the interior blast station 30 and also because a railcar would be readily available to enter the interior blast station 30 immediately. Moreover, after the railcar has been blasted in the interior blast station 30, painted and cured, the railcar may be stored within the cure queue area 27. These queue stations 26,27 may allow a railcar to be stored and therefore not take up space within one of the stations that may be utilized for another railcar.--

Please replace the third full paragraph on page 13 (p. 13, lines 20-29) with the following full paragraph:

--The assembly and test station [37] 39 may be utilized to reassemble railcars after repair, cleaning, painting, coating, lining and/or any other type of maintenance that may have been performed on the railcar. Further the assembly and test station [37] 39 may be utilized to test the railcars to verify that the maintenance to the railcars was successful. For example, if a lining was coated to the interior of a railcar, then the lining may be tested to

ensure that the lining has been properly applied. Generally, testers may determine whether the railcar has, in fact, received the maintenance required. Further, testers may determine whether the maintenance performed on the railcars meets predefined standards of acceptability. Standards may include internal company standards or may be specified by governmental bodies or agencies or other governing bodies.--

Please replace the second full paragraph on page 14 (p. 14, lines 8-13) with the following full paragraph:

--After a railcar has had maintenance performed thereon and has been tested and/or reassembled in the assembly and test station [37] 39, the railcars may exit the railcar maintenance facility 10 via an outbound railway 44. The outbound railway 44 may be connected with the assembly and test station [37] 39 or may otherwise be connected to the transfer area 18, as shown in Figure 1. The transfer tables 20,38 may transport a railcar to the outbound tracks 44 for exiting of the railcar from the railcar maintenance facility 10.--

Please replace the fourth paragraph on page 16 (p. 16, lines 25-30 and p. 17, lines 1-2) with the following full paragraph:

--After the tank car 202 is repaired via the fast track repair step 208 or the full repair 214, then the tank car 202 may be removed from the repair station 28a-28e. If the tank car 202 does not require interior or exterior painting (as noted below) then the tank car 202 may proceed directly to an "assembly and test" step 216 whereby the tank car 202 may enter the assembly and test station [37] 39. After the tank car 202 is reassembled and/or tested the tank car 202 may be removed from the assembly and test station [37] 39 via one of the transfer tables 20,38 and may exit the maintenance facility 10 via step 218 on the outbound railway 44.--

In the Claims

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. A method for repairing railcars, the method comprising the steps of:
providing a railcar maintenance facility wherein the maintenance facility comprises a plurality of maintenance stations and a transfer area;
providing a railcar requiring maintenance service;
moving the railcar to the transfer area;
transferring the railcar to at least one of the maintenance stations;
working on the railcar within the maintenance stations; [and]
moving the railcar out of the maintenance facility; and
holding a railcar with a queue area when a maintenance station is not available.

15. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of:
providing an inbound railway;
providing an inspection area connected to the inbound railway;
inspecting the railcar to determine the maintenance needs of the railcar; and
routing the railcar through the maintenance facility based on the maintenance needs.

16. The method of claim 1 [wherein the transfer means comprises a plurality of transfer tables and] further [wherein the method comprises the step] comprising the steps of:

providing a plurality of transfer tables within the transfer area; and

transferring a plurality of railcars through the facility via the plurality of transfer tables.

Please cancel claim 3.

Please add the following claims:

- 21. A method for repairing railcars, the method comprising the steps of:
- providing a railcar maintenance facility wherein the maintenance facility comprises a plurality of maintenance stations and a transfer area;
 - providing a railcar requiring maintenance service;
 - moving the railcar to the transfer area;
 - transferring the railcar to at least one of the maintenance stations;
 - working on the railcar within the maintenance stations;
 - moving the railcar out of the maintenance facility;
 - administering a lining to an interior of the railcar within a first maintenance stations; and
 - curing the lining with a second maintenance station.
22. A method for repairing railcars, the method comprising the steps of:
- providing a railcar maintenance facility wherein the maintenance facility comprises a plurality of maintenance stations and a transfer area;
 - providing a railcar requiring maintenance service;
 - moving the railcar to the transfer area;
 - transferring the railcar to at least one of the maintenance stations;
 - working on the railcar within the maintenance stations;
 - moving the railcar out of the maintenance facility;

providing an interior blast station for scoring an interior of the railcar;
providing a lining queue area connected to the transfer area; and
transferring the railcar to the lining queue area if the interior blast station is
unavailable to receive the railcar.

23. A method for repairing railcars, the method comprising the steps of:
providing a railcar maintenance facility wherein the maintenance facility
comprises a plurality of maintenance stations and a transfer area;
providing a railcar requiring maintenance service;
moving the railcar to the transfer area;
transferring the railcar to at least one of the maintenance stations;
working on the railcar within the maintenance stations; and
moving the railcar out of the maintenance facility;
providing a paint station connected to the transfer area;
providing a cure queue area connected to the transfer area; and
transferring the railcar to the cure queue area if the paint station is
unavailable to receive the railcar.

24. A method for repairing railcars, the method comprising the steps of:
providing a railcar maintenance facility wherein the maintenance facility
comprises a plurality of maintenance stations and a transfer area;
providing a railcar requiring maintenance service;
moving the railcar to the transfer area;
transferring the railcar to at least one of the maintenance stations;
working on the railcar within the maintenance stations; and

moving the railcar out of the maintenance facility;

providing a communication means at each maintenance station for communicating whether the maintenance station is available to receive the railcar;

communicating to an operator via the communication means the availability of the maintenance stations; and

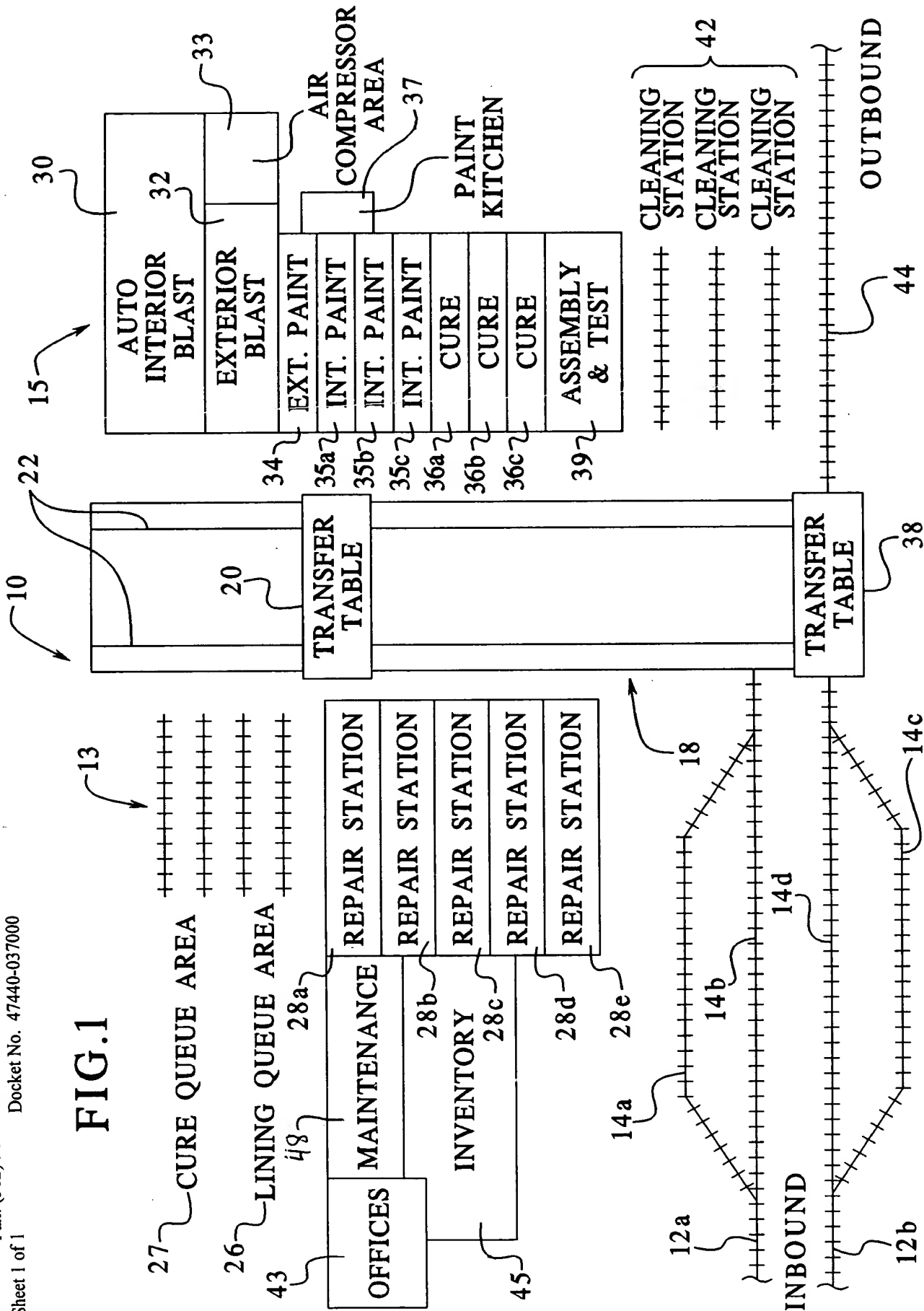
transferring the railcar to a maintenance station that is available based on the communication of the maintenance stations to the operator.--

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FIG. 1



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